

ENDORSEMENTS

Worship God! And Praise Away the Pounds! is NOT another diet book; it is not another formula on how to lose weight! It *is* a book about listening to God speak specifically to us about food for our individual bodies. Tonya's real-life journey with deep and personal transparencies of both defeats and victories are her personal testimony on how God can bring us to a place of peace and health in our bodies. She shares not only about listening to God on what to eat, but also listening to our bodies on how what we eat makes us feel. She shares how food is our fuel for a healthy life, full of vigor and purpose! Tonya's testimony of the journey God took her on will both challenge and encourage you. You will laugh and sometimes cry as you read about her journey, but you will also walk away with incentive to make lifestyle changes in your own relationship with food and how it affects you! God grant you success as you, along with Tonya, gain new freedoms to walk in the best God intended for you!

—**Lindee Hopkins**

Worship Leader and Pastor's Wife
Full Faith City Church

Hebrews 12:1 (KJV) states, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

Worship God! And Praise Away the Pounds! is an excellent book about how God showed Tonya what true worship and praise is and how to prepare her mind and body to praise and worship Him.

The Lord has shown Tonya that it is the "weights" in life that we have to deal with, and in her case the visible evidence was being overweight. The invisible evidence was realizing the reality of sin that we all have to deal with. Sin is a weight that is unseen, but we all carry it at one time or another.

I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for the wonderful gift He has given Tonya and for her courage and boldness to be so transparent about her life in order to help others "*Worship God! And Praise Away the Pounds!*"

—**Ravon C. Rainey, Th.D.**

President/Founder, Victorious Life Bible Institute

WORSHIP GOD!
AND PRAISE AWAY
THE POUNDS!

WORSHIP GOD! AND PRAISE AWAY THE POUNDS!

A Romans 12:1-2 Journey

TONYA WILLIAMSON



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CONTENTS



Acknowledgments	ix
Preface: My Story	xi
Introduction: Choose	xv
Strategy One: Present Your Body to God as a Sacrifice	
Chapter 1: Change	1
Chapter 2: Put God First	9
Chapter 3: Steps to Stay on Track	15
Chapter 4: The Importance of Water	21
Chapter 5: Get Moving	27
Strategy Two: Be Devoted and Consecrated to God	
Chapter 6: Set Apart for God	37
Chapter 7: Be God's Witness	41
Chapter 8: Keep Your Focus on God	47
Strategy Three: Give God Your Reasonable Service	
Chapter 9: Well-Pleasing Service	57
Chapter 10: Deeper Worship	65
Chapter 11: Safety Precautions	73

Strategy Four: Don't Conform to the World	
Chapter 12: Dress Differently	83
Chapter 13: Find True Freedom	91
Strategy Five: Be Transformed	
Chapter 14: From Caterpillar to Butterfly	103
Chapter 15: Livin' and Walkin'	111
Strategy Six: Renew Your Mind	
Chapter 16: Heart Matters	125
Chapter 17: The War Is On!	133
Chapter 18: What's Eating You?	141
Strategy Seven: Establish Yourself as Good, Acceptable, and Perfect	
Chapter 19: Establish Yourself	153
Chapter 20: Concluding Truths	163
Final Thoughts	173
Appendix	175
Helpful Scriptures	183
Notes	195

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WORSHIP GOD! AND PRAISE AWAY THE POUNDS!

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PREFACE

My Story



DECEMBER 31, 2009—A night to remember and an evening of firsts. It was our church’s first New Year’s Eve service in our new building.

It was the first time our church’s first praise-dance team performed.

It was the first time I praise-danced with a group.

It was the first time I executed a praise dance in front of people I knew well.

It was the first time I danced in front of members of the opposite sex.

It was the first time I felt remorsefully convicted about how I had treated my body.

It was the first time I realized that though I worshiped and praised God, I didn’t worship and praise Him in the truest sense of the words.

It was the first time I experienced a rebuke from God that shook my core with such force that it brought me to my knees and unleashed a fountain of sorrow and instantaneous sobs of repentance.

Here is how it all went down.

I was dressed in my praise-dance outfit, prepared for our time to dance, when the choir performed one of my favorite songs, “Jesus Reigns” by Youthful Praise. This song makes me want to dance and leap with joy every time I hear it!

Already pumped and bursting with gratitude and excitement because of the many firsts that were happening—and because I was celebrating

WORSHIP GOD! AND PRAISE AWAY THE POUNDS!

the end of another year—I felt joy that was off the charts! It was explosive! Praise burst forth from my body as if it came from a cannon, and the next thing I knew, I was dancing, twirling, and leaping all over the front of the church.

I danced so fiercely that my almost-two-hundred-pound body felt like only a hundred pounds! I felt as light-footed as a gazelle bounding along a mountainside, yet as robust as a newly formed tornado.

I liken the feeling I had to the way David must have felt when he danced out of his clothes after getting the ark back from Obed-Edom—except for one thing: I think David’s stamina was greater than mine. He had traveled to Obed-Edom’s house to get the ark, brought it back to his house, rejoiced the whole way back, sacrificed a bull and a calf, and after all of that he still had the energy to dance. His energy was still so strong that he danced right out of his clothes!

My energy, on the other hand, was short-lived. I hadn’t done much of anything that whole day other than practice the dance a few times. Yet shortly after its release, my explosive praise fizzled out like a sparkler on the Fourth of July, quickly dwindling to an ember. Thank goodness I was near the altar. I was so worn out after my few minutes of unrestrained praise that I needed to lie on the altar—not to pray but to rest.

I lay on the altar, trying to catch my breath and stop that burning feeling that comes in your chest when you run fast and hard. As I gasped for air, not only could I not breathe, but my body felt like an anvil dropped from the sky. The gazelle was gone.

Oddly, I still wanted to dance. I still wanted to praise God. I still had an arsenal of praise expressions inside me that I hadn’t unloaded. However, when I realized I was unable to continue praising God because of my exhaustion, I was left grief stricken and ashamed—ashamed that I had let my body, God’s temple, get to this point.

I began weeping uncontrollably. For the first time I understood how I had defiled the temple of God—how giving in to my sinful desires had created a less-than-excellent place for my beloved Master to dwell. For that I felt deep remorse.

Over and over I begged God’s forgiveness and apologized for all the selfish things I had done to the temple He had lent me. In that moment, I knew I would never behave the same way again. I realized the pain

PREFACE

I had inflicted upon my Father by how I had treated the gift He had given to me. This was the first time I felt a desire to change my sinful ways for His benefit and not my own.

In the midst of this, I heard His loving yet stern rebuke. I've since forgotten His exact words, but the gist was this: *You do not reflect me as best as you can.* Until that time, when people first saw me, I don't think they saw "good," "acceptable," or "pleasing." They saw my size and the fact that I was overweight.

His disappointment also conveyed, *When you talk about health and wellness, you ruin your own testimony.* This bruised my ego. As a health educator by occupation, and one who studies health and wellness for pleasure, how could I have the gall to talk about healthy habits and expect people to listen and change their behavior when I hadn't changed my own?

I was embarrassed, sorely grieved, and ashamed of how I represented myself and, more important, God. On the spot, I determined to change. I asked God to transform me.

Over the next several months, I studied Romans 12:1–2 and what it means to be transformed. This led to in-depth studies of these two verses. I desired, above all else, to offer my body to God as a sacrifice and for Him to be pleased with me.

Along the way, I journaled the things God showed and taught me. Four months later, God told me to put everything I had learned in a book and title it *Worship God! And Praise Away the Pounds!*

From December 31, 2009, until today, my life has definitely changed—in nature, function, and condition. Food no longer has the grip on me that it used to. I no longer dread moving this wonderful body God gave me. I no longer seek quick and easy fixes regarding my weight.

Now I seek God's way of doing things. Now I feel freer than I've ever felt in my life!

Don't get me wrong; this journey hasn't been, and still isn't, a piece of cake. It has been a constant battle—a battle between my flesh and my spirit. Many times a day I must choose between spiritual and fleshly, between life and death, between God's will and my own.

Sometimes I let my flesh get the upper hand, and when I do, I confess my sin, repent, and seek to discontinue doing that same thing again.

WORSHIP GOD! AND PRAISE AWAY THE POUNDS!

It's definitely a process. Thank God He is gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. It is my utmost desire to be holy, acceptable, and pleasing to God by presenting my body to Him as a living sacrifice. It is my prayer that you may be transformed, delivered, and set free as I have been. May this book minister to you and assist you as you seek to *Worship God! And Praise Away the Pounds!*

INTRODUCTION

Choose



CHRISTIANS OFTEN FORGET we are “to be in the world, yet not of it.” This said, we tend to function just as the world does. We approach situations and handle problems without consulting the Word of God, praying, or listening to the Holy Spirit. We do what comes naturally, behave according to tradition, or respond the way most everyone else does.

Everything we do, including the way we deal with weight and health issues, should lead us to God’s ways rather than to the world’s. Yet we follow mainstream diet plans, take diet pills, and buy in to weight-loss schemes. We forget the Word of God offers the answers to everything we could possibly face.

God’s Word tells us how to live and what to do in *every* situation—even when it comes to our weight. When we go to God’s Word, however, the priority should not be to get answers for things we want. As Christians, we should want to learn God’s perspective and give Him what He wants.

Worship God! And Praise Away the Pounds! is a biblical approach to weight loss. It is not a typical diet book and isn’t about how to lose weight per se. It is about how to follow God’s leading and, in doing so, to make right choices, become healthier, and thus lose excess weight. It is a guide for how to achieve wellness in mind, body, and spirit.

WORSHIP GOD! AND PRAISE AWAY THE POUNDS!

Worship God! And Praise Away the Pounds! teaches you how to live a life that is pleasing to God, utilizing Romans 12:1–2 as its foundation: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

In this book, these two verses are formed into seven strategies.

1. Present your body to God as a sacrifice.
2. Be devoted and consecrated to God.
3. Give God your reasonable service.
4. Don't conform to the world.
5. Be transformed.
6. Renew your mind.
7. Establish yourself as good, acceptable, and perfect.

These strategies point you to God's Word, teach you to live a life that pleases Him, free you from bondage, transform you, and establish you as “good, acceptable, and perfect.”

So what do you want? Do you want to continue to try to figure things out on your own? Do you want to continue doing things the world's way (which only offers a temporary fix, at best)? Do you want to continue carrying excess weight? Do you want to keep your current habits and lifestyle? Do you want to continue living in bondage and straining to figure things out?

Or do you want the best solutions to your problems? Do you want to live a life surrendered to God? Do you want to live for His glory and not your own? Do you want to rid yourself of excess weight permanently? Do you want to surrender your will to God's and submit to His authority? Do you want the freedom and rest that come when you let God figure things out?

The choice is yours. If you choose God's way, the journey will not be easy, but it will be rewarding! You will experience freedom and peace like never before. Why? Because the great Jehovah (the great “I Am”) will be guiding you, and He is everything you could ever need. As a matter

INTRODUCTION

of fact, two of His names are Jehovah Nissi (“Jehovah is my victory”) and Jehovah Shalom (“the Lord is Peace”).

Decide now. What do you want? Do you want to worship God and praise away the pounds? The way you live will signify your answer. If you want to live God’s way, continue reading!

Strategy One

PRESENT YOUR BODY TO
GOD AS A SACRIFICE

Chapter 1

CHANGE



HOW TRULY SORRY I felt coming face-to-face with the reality that I had misrepresented God. Even worse, He was the one who broke the news to me. I knew I was overweight, obese by medical standards, but it didn't seem like a sin to be "fat." Though I didn't like my weight and wanted to be smaller, I didn't think it had any real bearing on my Christianity. As far as I was concerned, I was good: I loved God and loved people, I served Him, I studied His Word, and I desired to please Him. Even though I had many messed-up areas I constantly asked, even begged, God to change and heal, my heart toward Him was pure.

I didn't realize, however, the barrier my weight was to my Christian testimony. I couldn't see how my heavy appearance worked against what I told others about the freedom and deliverance that come from God. I'm sure they believed me, but I have no doubt my appearance left question marks somewhere in their hearts. This was especially true when I talked to people about health. I believe that as they listened, my words went through a filter of "Look at you; if you know so much, why are you so heavy?" At least this is what I thought when I heard health talks from people who were overweight.

When God spoke to me that New Year's Eve while I lay on the altar sobbing, after realizing how dissolute I'd been toward Him regarding my eating, I wanted to hide. I didn't want anyone to see me as I misrepresented God. But God, in His mercy and grace, didn't want me to hide but to stand firm in Him. He prompted me to begin studying Romans 12:1–2. These

WORSHIP GOD! AND PRAISE AWAY THE POUNDS!

verses held the keys to my breakthrough. To be free, I had to do something, give up something, and allow God to change my thinking about eating. I desperately wanted to end the madness involving my relationship with food.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

—Romans 12:1–2 KJV

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

My journey to *Worship God! And Praise Away the Pounds!* began with Romans 12:1–2. I felt led to meditate on and study these verses before God even told me to write the book. These verses transformed me and changed me into someone pleasing to Him (even though I still have a long way to go). Since you’ve decided to worship God and praise away the pounds, Romans 12:1–2 is the place to start.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown’s commentary states that Romans 12 is about the duties of the believer, with the first comprehensive duty described in verses 1–2.¹ Verse 1 is an appeal for believers (Christians) to *do* something—to give their bodies to God and live their lives a certain way. Believers are urged to do everything as if it were a sacrifice, something offered to God as an act of worship. I like the way *The Message* phrases it: “Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life—and place it before God as an offering.” Simply put, our lives should be gifts—donations of worship—to God.

To help us better understand the meaning of worship, here are a few definitions.

- Reverence for a deity or sacred object; intense devotion to or esteem for a person or thing²
- Any action or attitude that expresses praise, love, and appreciation for God. Worship can be expressed through obedience.³
- To honor with extravagant love and *extreme submission*⁴ (emphasis mine)

CHANGE

True worship toward God involves an intense devotion of attitude and action that expresses praise, love, appreciation, and most of all, obedience. If we truly worship God, we will honor Him with “extreme submission.”

Submission to God involves the following actions:

- To surrender to the authority, discretion, or will of another⁵
- The act of yielding to power or authority; surrender of the person and power to the control or government of another⁶

When we submit to God, we surrender to His authority by allowing Him to make our decisions. Submitting isn't sharing leadership roles; it is resigning our power completely to God for Him to govern. If we add what we know about worship to the mix, we honor God by letting Him rule our lives with extreme submission—yielding to Him to the greatest possible degree. This means we will not exercise one iota of our power to rule our own lives.

I tried to visualize what extreme submission would look like. What came to mind was a picture of me in chains. This image, however, didn't fit the definition of submission because the chains represented holding me against my will. In this representation, instead of voluntarily surrendering my power, my power was involuntarily bound by the chains.

Then I saw it—an image of Jesus on the cross. Though He was nailed to the cross, His power wasn't bound. He could have annihilated His accusers, disintegrated the cross, and proved His omnipotence to the world, yet He didn't. He demonstrated extreme submission to the will of His Father and the saving power of the cross. All power existed within Him, yet He willingly surrendered to dying on the cross so we could be saved.

One last word must be understood for us to fully grasp our duty as believers, as well as how to be victorious over food and be found holy, acceptable, and pleasing to God: surrender.

To surrender is to give up oneself into the power of another; to yield; as the enemy, seeing no way of escape, surrendered at the first summons.⁷ Although *surrender* means nearly the same as *submit*, there is one distinct difference. To submit involves willingly yielding our personal power to

WORSHIP GOD! AND PRAISE AWAY THE POUNDS!

another because we *want* to. When we surrender, we yield because we *have* to, or because we see no other way out.

When we surrender, then, we are to give up our privileges to the power of another as if we have no way of escape. Looking a bit further into this definition, we can say that we, in our fleshly nature, are enemies with God and have no way of escaping death or the consequence of sin unless we surrender to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Surrendering to God is what frees us from sin and death. If we give up our own desires and yield to His, we can be free from bondage to food and excess weight. When we surrender to God's will for our lives, not only will we be free, but we will be considered holy, acceptable, and pleasing because we are in His perfect will. We may not want to surrender our bodies to God. After all, we have the right to do what we please. As Christians, however, surrender is our spiritual act of worship, our reasonable service, our duty. For most of us, our personal rights and privileges regarding food and activity would look quite different if we were under God's command. Here are some examples from my own personal history of exercising rights and privileges that were not under God's command.

IRRATIONAL BEHAVIOR

At my worst, when I ate everything I wanted to eat and didn't consider God's will or that I had a duty to serve God with my body, I recall making insane choices regarding food. For instance, on a whim, my husband and I escaped to TJ Cinnamons to purchase sticky buns. Dementedly, I directed the server to scrape up all of the syrupy goo that was left from other buns and slap it in my container. I then proceeded to the free-toppings counter and slathered on as much cream cheese icing as would fit into my container. It tasted good going down, but afterward I felt sick and shaky from the sugar overload. Still, I foolishly repeated this act again and again.

On another occasion I went to a favorite pizza place and ordered two medium pizzas with everything plus extra cheese. My husband and I ate all of it, and I ate just as much as he did. Other times I bought a pound of fudge, got another pound free, and ate most of it by myself.

CHANGE

Once my husband and I went to a famous seafood and steak house with an all-you-can-eat buffet. I madly scarfed down three or four plates of food. I ate more than my stomach could hold; food had accumulated to the top of my esophagus. I had little room in my lungs and diaphragm because my stomach was so distended, which made it extremely difficult to breathe. Every time I moved, I felt as if I would vomit. The short walk to the restroom took an extended amount of time since I needed to move slowly to prevent throwing up in the restaurant. As soon as I got to the toilet, food gushed out of my mouth like a spewing hydrant.

CONVICTION

As embarrassing as it is to admit this repulsive behavior, I'm mortified to say that these were some of the ways I "joyfully" yet secretly behaved until God began to convict me. The conviction caused gradual shifts in my behavior. I went from being a food maniac to a person with an almost complete lack of self-control before I understood the wantonness of my actions.

Worse, I was a Christian engaging in this type of rash behavior. As a matter of fact, I thought it was fun to go places and eat like a pig until my heart was "content" and my stomach engorged. I didn't think about the internal damage I could have done by eating so much food. I didn't even think about what was happening to my health and my weight. Foolishly, all I thought about was what I wanted to eat next and how good it would taste.

Though I didn't realize it then, I know now I was killing myself. By exercising my rights and privileges to eat whatever I wanted, I was leading myself to an early grave. God waited all the while in the background for me to surrender my will to His so He could show me a better way—the way to life and health.

God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. Only He knows everything. Then why do we foolishly ignore Him? We act as if we know everything simply because we have a personal will, but following our own will gets us into trouble every time. How can we *not* get into trouble surrendering to our own will, then, when our very nature is sinful? Since this is the case, it stands to reason that acting on what we will, will cause us to sin. God, on the other hand, has a sinless

WORSHIP GOD! AND PRAISE AWAY THE POUNDS!

nature. When we surrender to His will, we will be led down the path of righteousness and sinlessness.

What about you? What are your desires? What has your will led you to do? Has it led you to life or death? In our flesh, we head straight toward the path of destruction. When we follow the voice of the Holy Spirit, we are on the path to life—a life that is healthy and good.

SURRENDER

Let's let the Holy Spirit rule and guide us in our decisions. He wants to lead us on the right path. We need to ask God what to do about everything—nothing is too small or too silly to take to Him.

After realizing my need to seek the Holy Spirit for His guidance, I stopped following diet plans and the things I had learned in my many health classes. I began asking God how to eat. I started opening my refrigerator and saying, “God, show me what to eat.” Whatever I felt I heard Him say was what I ate. I didn't measure amounts or analyze whether I needed more or less of one kind of food or another. I just ate what I felt the Lord told me.

Sometimes as I pulled things out of my refrigerator, I heard a small voice say, “Not that” or “Put that away.” Other times the same voice told me to get the very food that previously I was told to not eat. There seemed to be no set pattern for what I could or couldn't eat. Some days I could have a dessert or something sweet, other days I couldn't. Some days I could eat fruit, other days I felt led not to. The Holy Spirit taught me to surrender my will and submit to His authority. He taught me how to listen to the voice of God and to check with my body to see how it felt after I'd eaten.

It had never occurred to me to check with my body to see how it responded to what I ate. I ate whatever my mind dictated, and my body's response was of no concern. God taught me to connect my eating to my senses. He taught me to think about what I was eating and to notice the pleasure or pain connected to it. I began to enjoy flavors I hadn't enjoyed before and find pleasure in textures I had previously ignored. I began to realize that some foods made me feel jittery, but others gave me energy. Some foods digested easily, but others caused gas, bloating, and constipation.

CHANGE

God, in His infinite wisdom, opened up a whole new world to me regarding food. He helped me to see what brought fulfillment and life, as well as pain and death. When we listen and yield to the wisdom of God, we learn many wonderful things.

In summary, it is our Christian duty to live lives of worship to God. We do this by surrendering our will and submitting to His authority so we can be found holy, pleasing, and acceptable to Him, which is our reasonable service.

Call to Action

1. How can you improve your worship to God (see definitions of worship, submission, and surrender in the chapter)?
2. What do you need to surrender to God?
3. What will your life look like if you submit to God's authority?
4. Now that you've reflected on these questions, what is one action God is prompting you to take?

Father, please forgive me for doing whatever I want rather than what pleases You. Forgive me for making choices with the precious body You've given me that lead me to death and cause me to be irreverent toward You. Help me to love You more than I love the things that please me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.